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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000503

SIPDIS

NSC FOR TSHANNON AND CBARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA POLITICAL UPDATE: 2/11/2004

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR CHARLES S. SHAPIRO FOR REASONS
1.5(B) AND (D)

SUMMARY:

1. CNE:

-- (C) CARTER CENTER REPRESENTATIVE FRANCISCO DIEZ TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) NOW CLAIMS THAT THERE ARE ONLY 3,000 SIGNATURE FORMS (OR 30,000 SIGNATURES) THAT ARE BEING QUESTIONED, A SIGNIFICANT DOWN-GRADE FROM THE 65,000 FORMS (OR 650,000 SIGNATURES) DESCRIBED ON FEBRUARY 10.

-- (U) CNE ANNOUNCED IT WILL INVOKE A 5-DAY PERIOD DURING WHICH VOTERS COULD PERSONALLY VERIFY THEIR NAMES.

2. OPPOSITION:

-- (U) THE OPPOSITION NGO SUMATE WILL PROVIDE DEMONSTRATORS WITH A COPY OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL SIGNATURE TO MARCH TO CNE HEADQUARTERS FEBRUARY 14.

-- (U) THE OPPOSITION DEMOCRATIC COORDINATING COMMITTEE (DCC) NOW PLANS TO HAVE A SMALLER MARCH TO THE CNE ON FEBRUARY 13, COMPOSED OF A SMALL CADRE OF OPPOSITION LEADERS, TO PUBLICLY DEMAND A RESPONSE ON THE REFERENDUM.

3. GOV:

-- (U) PRO-CHAVEZ ACTIVIST LINA RON AND A BAND OF BOLIVARIAN CIRCLE MEMBERS HAVE ESTABLISHED CAMPS ON THE GROUNDS OF THE CNE BUILDING, AND PLEDGE TO PROTECT" THE CNE FROM ANY OPPOSITION INVASION.

-- (U) THE GOV IS ALSO SPONSORING A YOUTH MARCH FR FEBRUARY 11 THROUGH 13, CREATING WHAT THE OPPOSTION SAYS IS COVER TO BUS IN HUNDREDS OF PRO-CHAEZ TOUGHS TO INTIMIDATE OR ATTACK OPPOSITION ARCHERS.

-- (C) EXILED CTV LABOR LEADER CARLOS RTEGA CLAIMED THE GOV PLANS TO USE THE OPPOSITIO MARCHES ON APRIL 13 AND 14 AS AN PRETEXT TO LAUNH A SELF COUP, IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT WOULD DECLRE MARSHAL LAW, SUSPEND THE CONSTITUTION, AND ARRET OR OTHERWISE REMOVE ALL OPPOSITION LEADERS. CV LEADER MAUAL COVA TOLD DCM ON FEBRUARY 11 THATHE DID NOT BELEIVE ORTEGA'S CLAIMS WERE ACCURATE.

-- (U) POLITICAL ALLIES OF THE PRESIDENT HAVE GNE PUBLIC WITH ALLEGATIONS OF COUP-PLOTTING AND ARN OF OPPOSITION-INSTIGATED VIOLENCE.

-- (C) CHAVEZ AND HIS SUPPORTERS CONTINUE TO ALLEGE USG COLLUSION WITH HIS OPPONENTS.

END SUMMARY.

CNE: NEW CONFUSION ON NUMBER OF QUESTIONABLE FORMS

4. (C) CARTER CENTER REPRESENTATIVE FRANCISCO DIEZ TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT DURING A MORNING MEETING WITH CNE DIRECTORS EZEQUIEL ZAMORA (OPPOSITION) AND JORGE RODRIGUEZ (PRO-GOV) ON FEBRUARY 11, THEY ASSURED HIM THEY WERE AWARE OF THE SERIOUS ISSUE OF WHOLESAL INVALIDATION OF SIGNATURES. DIEZ SAID THE CNE NOW CLAIMS THAT THERE ARE ONLY 3,000 SIGNATURE FORMS (OR 30,000 SIGNATURES) THAT ARE BEING QUESTIONED, A SIGNIFICANT DOWN-GRADE FROM THE 65,000 FORMS (OR 650,000 SIGNATURES) DESCRIBED ON FEBRUARY 10. ZAMORA AND RODRIGUEZ AGREED THAT THE CARTER CENTER WOULD PRESENT SOME TECHNICAL ALTERNATIVES TO THE CNE FOR DEALING WITH THE ISSUE.

5. (U) CNE PRESIDENT OSCAR BATTAGLINI ANNOUNCED LATER FEBRUARY 11 THAT THE SIGNATURE FORMS FILLED OUT IN THE SAME HANDWRITING (THE SO-CALLED "PLANILLAS PLANAS," EE REFTTEL) WOULD NOT BE NULLIFIED. INSTEAD, BATAGLINI SUGGESTED THAT THE CNE WILL PUBLISH A LIST OF QUESTIONABLE SIGNATRES AND

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-- (U) THE GOV IS ALSO SPONSORING A YOUTH MARCH FOR FEBRUARY 11 THROUGH 13, CREATING WHAT THE OPPOSITION SAYS IS COVER TO BUS IN HUNDREDS OF PRO-CHAVEZ TOUGHS TO INTIMIDATE OR ATTACK OPPOSITION MARCHERS.

-- (C) EXILED CTV LABOR LEADER CARLOS ORTEGA CLAIMED THE GOV PLANS TO USE THE OPPOSITION MARCHES ON APRIL 13 AND 14 AS AN PRETEXT TO LAUNCH A SELF COUP, IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT WOULD DECLARE MARSHAL LAW, SUSPEND THE CONSTITUTION, AND ARREST OR OTHERWISE REMOVE ALL OPPOSITION LEADERS. CTV LEADER MAUAL COVA TOLD DCM ON FEBRUARY 11 THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE ORTEGA'S CLAIMS WERE ACCURATE.

-- (U) POLITICAL ALLIES OF THE PRESIDENT HAVE GONE PUBLIC WITH ALLEGATIONS OF COUP-PLOTTING AND WARN OF OPPOSITION-INSTIGATED VIOLENCE.

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15. (U) CNE PRESIDENT OSCAR BATTAGLINI ANNOUNCED LATER FEBRUARY 11 THAT THE SIGNATURE FORMS FILLED OUT IN THE SAME HANDWRITING (THE SO-CALLED "PLANILLAS PLANAS," SEE REFTTEL) WOULD NOT BE NULLIFIED. INSTEAD, BATTAGLINI SUGGESTED THAT THE CNE WILL PUBLISH A LIST OF QUESTIONABLE SIGNATURES AND

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RSION TO A CNE OFFICE.

MARCHING ORDERS

16. (C) THE OPPOSITION HAS ANNOUNCED SEVERAL PUBLIC EVENTS DESIGNED TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE CNE'S EXPECTED FAILURE TO CERTIFY SUFFICIENT SIGNATURES TO SCHEDULE A PRESIDENTIAL RECALL REFERENDUM BY THE POLITICALLY SYMBOLIC FEBRUARY 13 DEADLINE. ENRIQUE MENDOZA ANNOUNCED THAT THE OPPOSITION IS PLANNING A MARCH ON THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) BUILDING ON SATURDAY FEBRUARY 14. SUMATE, THE OPPOSITION NGO THAT MAINTAINS DIGITIZED COPIES OF OPPOSITION SIGNATURE SHEETS, TOLD POLOFF THAT THEY WILL HAVE TWO THOUSAND

VOLUNTEERS ARRAYED AT A RALLYING POINT NEAR PLAZA ENEZUELA IN THE CAPITAL WITH PRINTED COPIES OF TE SIGNATURES. DEMONSTRATORS WILL RECEIVE A PRINTD PHOTOCOPY OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL SIGNATURE LINE T CARRY IN A MARCH TO THE CNE HEADQUARTERS.

17. C) OPPOSITION SOURCES HAVE TOLD POLOFFS THAT SEVERL LEADERS IN THE BROAD OPPOSITION DEMOCRATIC COODINATING COMMITTEE (DCC) HAD HOPED TO HAVE A MASIVE DEMONSTRATION ON FEBRUARY 13 TO MARK THE 30-AY DEADLINE FOR A DECISION ON A REFERENDUM FROM TE CNE, BUT SUMATE LEADERS PREFERRED TO MOBILIZE HEIR VOLUNTEERS ON FEBRUARY 14 FOR TECHNICAL REASONS. THE DCC NOW PLANS TO HAVE A SMALLER MARCH TOTHE CNE ON FEBRUARY 13, COMPOSED OF A SMALL CADR OF OPPOSITION LEADERS, TO PUBLICLY DEMAND A RESPNSE ON THE REFERENDUM.

18. (C) THE GOV AND ITS SPPORTERS ARE PLANNING TO COUNTER THE OPPOSITION ARCHES WITH DEMONSTRATIONS OF THEIR OWN. PRO-CHAEZ ACTIVIST LINQ%QQH,ING AND WARN OF OPPOSITION-INSTIGATED IOLENCE.

CTV LEADER MANUEL COVA TOLD DCM ON FEBRARY 11 THAT ORTEGA HAD NOTHING TO BACK UP THESE LLEGATIONS, AND THAT HE SIS NOT BELIEVE TEH GOV AD A SHORT-TERM PLAN FOR AN AUTOGOLPE. JUAN BARETO, A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY FROM THE CHAVISTA-ALIED BLOC FOR CHANGE (BLOQUE DE CAMBIO) PARTY ANOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 10 HE HAD INFORMATION OF AN OPOSITION PLOT TO INCITE VIOLENCE TO COVER THEIR PLANNED COUP D'ETAT. ISMAEL GARCIA, A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY FROM THE PRO-CHAVEZ PODEMOS PARTY, ALLEGED THE OPPOSITION MARCH WOULD PROCEED TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN MIRAFLORES, HOPING TO INITIATE A REPEAT OF THE EVENTS OF APRIL 2001.

19. (C) CHAVEZ AND HIS SUPPORTERS CONTINUE TO ALLEGE USG COLLUSION WITH HIS OPPONENTS. THE OFFICIAL GOV TELEVISION STATION RAN A STORY ON FEBRUARY 10, 2004 ALLEGING THAT MARIA CORINA MACHADO, A DIRECTOR OF OPPOSITION NGO SUMATE, HAS RECEIVED MONEY FROM THE USG. THIS FOLLOWS ON THE HEELS OF CHAVEZ'S FEBRUARY 9 TELEVISED REMARKS IN WHICH HE ACCUSED THE USG OF FUNDING OPPOSITION FORCES BENT ON HIS REMOVAL (SEPTEL). SHAPIRO

NOTE: SVC FOR GRABLED TEXT SECTION 02 OF 02

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